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Special theme: Learning assessment in open, distance and flexible education

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Learning assessment in open, distance and flexible education

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Learning assessment is established as a key process in education. Being learning the goal of educational initiatives, its evaluation becomes the means to analyse, guide and promote students' performance.

Learning assessment in open and distance education is facing new challenges and scenarios, due to current or renewed conceptual and political frames -such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)- and to the increasing number of developments in the technological and pedagogical fields -such as automatic assessment tools or peer grading in massive open online courses.

Within this context, the current issue of *Open Praxis* focuses on the assessment of students' learning in open, distance and flexible education. The call for papers acknowledged aspects such as the following:

- Assessment challenges in open and distance education.
- Innovations in assessment methodologies and tools.
- Technological tools for assessment. Pedagogical possibilities and limits.
- Successful and relevant experiences of use of new methods, techniques and tools.

The expectation was to cover theoretical foundations, concepts, analysis and results of studies regarding learning assessment in open and distance education, referring to aspects such as integration of teaching, learning and assessment processes; limits and possibilities of diverse assessment methodologies and tools for diverse knowledge, skills and competences; challenges that assessment faces in open education; links between learning assessment and other relevant aspects in open and distance education: credentialing, educational quality and improvement; learning analytics, etc. We also expected to provide a description and analysis of concrete experiences of use and implementation of new assessment methods and tools in open and distance education: peer-evaluation, self-evaluation, badges, e-portfolios, prior learning assessment and recognition, etc.

The issue presents five papers covering different aspects regarding learning assessment, from reflections on assessment challenges to the use of rubrics in a course, going through a review of feedback in distance education or aspects to consider during examinations.

In the first paper, Moeketsi Letseka and Victor Pitsoe (*Reflections on assessment in Open Distance Learning (ODL): the case of the University of South Africa (UNISA)*) describe the implications of assessment when it is focused on quality of teaching and learning. They deepen in the experience of a specific course at UNISA, where they advocate for formative assessment combined with final examination. Among the challenges in ODL, the authors highlight their concern with authorship of assignments -specially when there are big differences between students' performance in the assignments and in final exam- a question that remains unsolved.

S. V. S. Chaudhary and Niradhar Dey (*Assessment in Open and Distance Learning System (ODL): A Challenge*) provide a comprehensive overview of practices and challenges faced by ODL systems. Among the latter, integration between formative and summative assessment is again underlined. Less experimented practices, like open-book examinations or extended use of e-portfolios, are also

discussed. The authors stand up for a renovation of conventional practices of students' assessment in ODL, always linking it with learning improvement.

Anthony Odera Unamma (*Community members' interference and conduct of University distance learning examinations In South Eastern Nigeria*), under the assumption that communities are interfering in examinations in Nigerian universities with distance learning programmes, highlights through a survey-based study characteristics, consequences and measures to reduce negative interference. A set of recommendations for University administrators is provided, founded on the promotion of university-community collaboration.

Jane Costello and Daph Crane (*Technologies for learner centered feedback*) go into detail about one of the elements identified by previous authors among formative assessment pillars, i.e. feedback. After describing the importance of feedback for learning and identifying different types of it, they focus on technologies to provide feedback (typed, audio, video, automated, etc.) and their relationship with more or less suitable feedback methods. They broaden the e-feedback landscape to help instructors innovate and increase students' motivation and learning.

Closing the special section of papers focused on learning assessment in open, distance and flexible education, Ishan Sudeera Abeywardena (*Mastery of Course Learning Outcomes in ODL: A Case Study of the Pearson eCollege Learning Outcome Manager*) analyses the correlation between continuous and final assessment marks, and mastery of course learning outcomes (measured with rubrics setup on a web based software platform) in a specific course. The process is explained in detail, and leads to practical conclusions and recommendations, both in the methodological and technological domains.

Although some aspects addressed in the call remain unexplored or are not analysed in depth in this issue, papers cover a wide range of topics and case studies in relation with assessment in ODL. In addition to the articles for the special theme, the issue includes two contributions that fall within the sphere of interest of the journal, i.e. research and innovation in open, distance and flexible education.

In the innovative practice articles section of the journal, Samuel Adesola Adeyemo, Gloria Olusola Adedaja and Omobola Adedore (*Mobile technology: implications of its application on learning*), present a focus group discussions-based study developed at University of Ibadan, following Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights some problems and possibilities in the use of mobile phones for learning from the students' perspective. Implications of their findings are relevant to institutional and educational providers.

Finally, Mandar L. Bhanushe (*theCN.com: An Academic-cum-Social Networking Online Platform*), reviews a learning platform that introduces social networking besides traditional platform features, i.e. course content delivery and management. He describes mainly positive aspects of this platform for ODL.

Our wish in *Open Praxis* is that the topics covered in this issue contribute to reflection, debate and improvement of learning assessment in open and distance education practices, and in ODL in general. We invite readers to revise our [volume 5 issue 1](#) (special issue on openness in higher education), where prior learning assessment and recognition (RPL or PLAR), as a means to credentialing for lifelong learning, was dealt with in three papers.

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